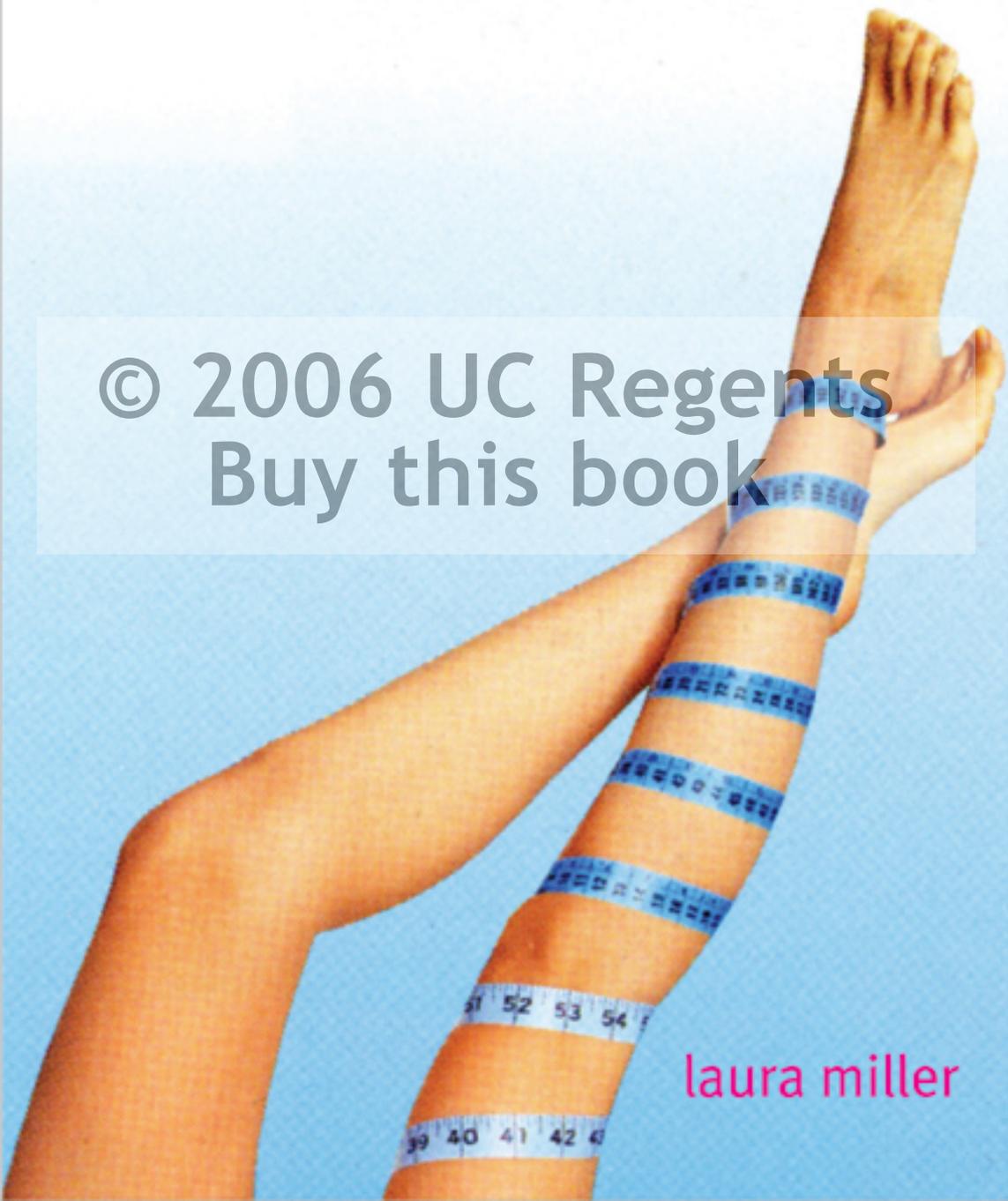


beauty up

EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE BODY AESTHETICS

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CHAPTER I

Changing Beauty Ideology

An advertisement for something called Super Bust Rich in the January 1994 issue of the women's magazine *Can Cam* caught my attention. The ad for the tablets, priced at \$150, promised, "For the person who worries about their bust, big news!" A Japanese model wearing a flowered pink bikini was accompanied by testimony from a twenty-two-year-old consumer: "My breasts were small, so during high school I had a complex. But this spring I had confidence and was able to get a cool boyfriend." Here was a product for something that I had always thought was not a "body problem" for Japanese women.

There are societies that do not value women chiefly on the basis of their appearance, I was once fond of telling my students. Just look at Japan, where women are primarily judged by their cheerful personalities, lineage, and good manners, not by their eye shape or bra size. Based on knowledge of others' scholarship as well as my own experience living and working in Japan in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I felt confident about making such an assertion. I insisted that Japan was free of wretched implant foolishness and widespread anorexia. In her reflections on growing up in Japan, Mori noted the difference between American women's obsession with their bodies and Japanese women's relative lack of concern: "I care about my health, but I don't dwell on the shapes and sizes of various parts of my body, the way many American women seem to. My attitude toward the body is more pragmatic, I realized, because I grew up in Japan" (1999: 109–10). Mori's words supported what I once thought was true about Japanese body attitudes, but media images from the mid-1990s did

not mesh with this idea at all. I wanted to make sense of the apparent shift away from an emphasis on women as social actors, as wives, mothers, and daughters, toward sexualized female bodies and beautified body surfaces. The Super Bust Rich ad suggested that one's breast size did have an impact on the ability to get a boyfriend and, more importantly, to gain confidence.

In this chapter, I survey changes in beauty and body styles and suggest how they might be symbolic of shifting values and attitudes. I do not think that products and services for crafted beauty are only marketing outcomes. Super Bust Rich and other new products are part of a beauty system that is tightly connected to developments in the coding and definition of gender. While older styles denoted a woman's degree of commitment to modernity or tradition, such as the prewar "radio roll" (*rajio-maki*) hairstyle, recent styles more readily express a displacement of identity onto the body surface. In addition, it will be clear that there is not only one form of femininity reproduction. Changes in postwar Japanese society have allowed the creation of multiple styles that may be used to define generational, class, regional, or subcultural identities. (I use the term *subcultural* to mean a segment of the population with its own values, expectations, and lifestyle preferences.) Some contemporary concepts of female beauty have deep and enduring roots, while others are radically divergent from past ideals. Finally, the circulation of global beauty imaging results in adoption of various mixed forms that may draw inspiration from diverse cultures or historical eras. Everything about the body and fashion is subject to mash up and recontextualization. Although this type of hybrid beauty reflects domestically creolized innovation, critics often wrongly interpret it as an attempt to mimic Euroamerican appearance.

Beauty Transformations

Over a century ago, Darwin (1859) observed that people in different parts of the world define human physical beauty according to local criteria. There is wide variation in traits considered to be aesthetically meaningful, often tied to a group's economic or political ideology (Shilling 1993; Ortner and Whitehead 1981). One theory proposed to explain the diversity in beauty perception is that a social group most values the predominant features that it is exposed to, the so-called imprinting theory of sexual attraction (Diamond 1992). Western media often report that, based

on studies by psychologists (often based on survey response from their undergraduate students), some concepts of beauty, such as a female “hourglass” shape, are imprinted biologically. Yet cross-cultural research on concepts of beauty, mainly limited to heterosexual females, has uncovered no universal standards for beauty other than cleanliness and clear, unblemished skin. Even within one social group, standards of beauty vary over time, even between two generations.

Some of the most interesting changes in Japan’s beauty ideology date from the Heian era (794–1185). Our knowledge of aristocratic standards of beauty derives from literary descriptions in diaries and novels, and visual representations in paintings. A court lady ideally had a pale, round, plump face with elongated eyes. The eyebrows were plucked and repainted somewhat above their original positions. Gleaming white teeth were thought to be horribly ghoul-like, so they were darkened. Positive assessment of chubbiness was also common, as in descriptors like “well-rounded and plump” (*tsubutsubu to fuetaru*) and “plump person” (*fukuraku naru hito*) (Morris 1964: 202). Perhaps most importantly, a woman’s hair should be long, straight, and lustrous, reaching at least to the ground.

We know much about the beauty norms of the Edo period (1603–1867), as documented in “portraits of beautiful women” (*bijin-ga*). These usually depict courtesans with long, thin faces, fair skin, small lips, blackened teeth, thickset necks, and rounded shoulders (Hamanaka and Newland 2000; Hickey 1998).¹ Later artistic representations of beauties often showed petite women with round faces, straight eyes with flat eyelids, and small receding chins. In 1908, young women competed in Japan’s first official beauty contest, an event sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune*’s world beauty hunt and accomplished via photographic submission. A panel of thirty artists and intellectuals appraised the photos of two hundred Japanese contestants and selected the winning photo of a sixteen-year-old woman named Suehiro Hiroko, which was subsequently published in the *Chicago Tribune* (*Nishi Nihon Shimbun* 1995). Miss Suehiro had a round, pale face, a small mouth, and narrow eyes. Some Japanese scholars cite these facial features as expressions of the values of submissiveness, gentleness, and modesty (Nakamura 1980; Shirakabe 1990).

Today few of these facial attributes are promoted by the media or desired by young women. It is tempting to assume that facial features sought in contemporary Japan, such as a larger eye shape and a thinner nose bridge, stem from postwar Americanization and that one of the primary “imports” during this time was a hegemonic white American concept of beauty (C. Hall 1995; Kaw 1993; Kawazoe 2004; Kowner and Ogawa

FIGURE 1.
 Painting by
 Hashiguchi Goyō:
Keishō no onna
 (Woman applying
 makeup), 1918.
 Honolulu
 Academy of Arts,
 Bequest of the
 Estate of Leslie B.
 Andrews, 1990
 (20,716).



1993). Yet modifications to existing beauty ideology were already well under way during the Meiji era (1868–1912) due to Japan’s increased contact with Europe and the West. By the early part of the twentieth century, portraiture indicates that among urban elites, features once thought to be unfeminine and harsh, such as a long or well-projected nose and a prominent chin, were now considered attractive. For example, a beauty of 1922 from the cover of a magazine for high school girls named *Reijōkai* (Society of young ladies) shows a thin, pale girl with huge eyes and soft, sloping shoulders (Fraser, Heller, and Chwast 1996: 109). An enduring theme in paintings of beauties was women applying makeup, a genre continued in the work of Hashiguchi Goyō (1880–1921). An example of modified traditional femininity is seen in his woodblock print *Woman Applying Makeup* (1918, figure 1), which shows a woman at her toilette. Her white

skin and drooping shoulders are old-fashioned, but her hair is a modernized version of an older style.

One prewar trendsetter for female appearance was the Modern Girl, or *modan gāru* (usually clipped to *moga*), new working women who were avid consumers of the latest fashions (Sato 2003). The *moga* used makeup to create big Betty Boop eyes with crescent eyebrows (Inoue 1998; Tsuda 1985: 62). She also had a small mouth, short permed hair, sloping shoulders, and pale skin. Seidensticker (1983: 257) once described the Taishō (1912–1926) beauty as languorous, wan, and consumptive. A typical *moga* is found in Kobayakawa Kiyoshi's 1936 woodblock print *A Bit Topsy* (Inoue 1998: 94). In this print, he depicts a high-class café waitress with a fleshy body, pale skin, round face, and large eyes. Yet the appearance of the Modern Girl did not produce a simple contrast with the traditional woman, but rather created a continuum of style options: "Between these compelling opposites of radical modernity and reactionary tradition is a rich and passionate middle ground, where the styles and values of the *moga* and the good wife/wise mother mingle" (Brown 2001: 19).

Influence from Western fashion was seen in makeup and hairstyles more broadly than in clothing styles. In the 1930s, even women who still wore kimonos usually had adopted modern cosmetics and hairstyles. Beauty how-to books of the era provided instruction on how to achieve a modern appearance, which was not always a straightforward imitation of Euroamerican style. For example, in drawings found in one manual (Tsuda 1985), a reader is shown how the new Japanese woman's eye makeup differs from that of a Western woman (figure 2). The contrast tells us that use of borrowed makeup did not necessarily result in a simple emulation of non-Japanese styles.

In addition to the face and hair, the nape of the neck had been singled out for commentary and eroticization for at least two centuries. The nape is emphasized by the kimono, and not surprisingly, nape appreciation decreased somewhat after the 1920s, as fewer women wore them. Despite this change, the nape is still considered an erotic part of a woman's body. Audrey Hepburn's nape once drew considerable erotic attention and was often featured in print media during the 1960s. According to a poll conducted by *Fine Boys* magazine (1998), it follows the bust, legs, lips, and pupils of the eyes as the parts of the body thought to possess the most "sex appeal." The nape continues to be a focus of beauty work for many women.

A new discourse of female body aesthetics arose during the prewar

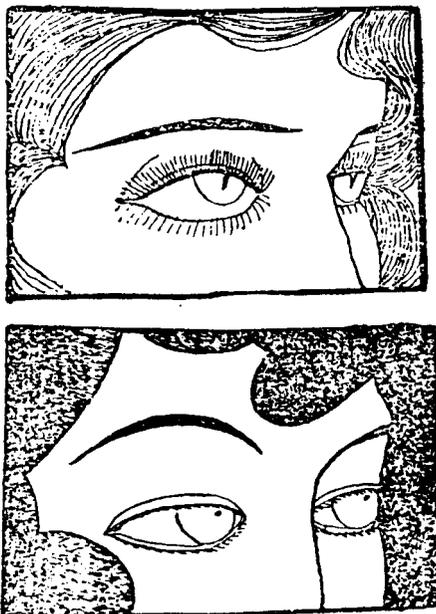


FIGURE 2. A 1924 beauty manual contrasts Japanese- (bottom) and Western-style (top) makeup.

period, a discourse tied to the promotion of a healthy and fertile female body required for reproductive fitness (Frühstück 2003). Robertson (2001) has linked this new aesthetic to ideas relating to selective breeding for racial improvement (eugenics) and to nationalistic ideology. The fit bodies of contestants in the first Miss Nippon beauty contest, held in 1931, were judged on the basis of their robustness and putative racial purity.

A classically beautiful type of early postwar woman was actress Tanaka Kinuyo, described as a bit zaftig and petite, with a moon-shaped face, narrow eyes, and a small, cherry-like mouth (Buruma 1984). Ochiai (1997), who has tracked imaging of women in Japanese print media, finds worship of the Euroamerican standard of beauty in the early postwar era. She notes a distinct split between depictions of healthy, cute, wholesome Japanese women on the one hand, and sensual and sexy white women on the other.² Until the 1960s, images of Japanese women mainly illustrated reified versions of the professional housewife ideal or modest young women and “troops of preparatory housewives” (Ochiai 1997: 165). When female sexuality was represented, it was deflected onto foreign models and actresses, so “Japanese women had to camouflage themselves as white



FIGURE 3. The cute aesthetic, displayed by porn idol Kogure Chie. From the June 1990 cover of the adult video magazine *Apple Tsūshin*.

to become sexy” (Ochiai 1997: 157). It is only during the era of high cuteness in the late 1970s and 1980s that we see a distancing from the Euro-american standard of beauty.

Compared to the sophisticated girls of the 1920s and 1930s and the voluptuous womanly icons of the immediate postwar era (see Izbicki 1997), the ideal cute type of the 1970s seems that much more cloying and nonthreatening. Some scholars have linked the popularity of the cute style to a Lolita complex, in which images of young girls, or women pretending to be young girls, are a focal point of adult comics, pornography, and other media. For example, the cover of an adult video magazine features porn actress Kogure Chie dressed in a wholesome country-girl frock (figure 3). This change in beauty ideology was manifested in the demand for a new type of mainstream female celebrity as well. Popular singers were young women who portrayed innocence and nonthreatening cute-

ness. Stars such as Yamaguchi Momoe and Matsuda Seiko epitomized the desired qualities of the undeveloped girl. These mincing pixies clad in hair ribbons and frilly pastel pinafores were exemplary of endearing youth, purity, and cuteness (Kinsella 1995). A variant of the cute idol was the beautiful young maiden (*bishōjo*), a perky, well-mannered, and well-dressed young woman (Schilling 1992: 210). Media star Miyazawa Rie was once considered a premier maiden. Later, her representation in the media, where she was dubbed the “Heisei Venus,” took on other, naughtier connotations after a scandal over her nude appearance in a photography book. Yamazaki Kōichi (1993: 132) noted that in 1990 the top-ranked female idols were not sexy, but rather reflected the “cool older-sister” type.

Fossilized imprints of the cute aesthetic are still around, but in the 1990s a new beauty ideology arose, which promoted a more mature-looking female body. Many Lolita pupae became “body-conscious girls” (*bodii-kon gyaru*), young women who worked hard at creating a sexy and fit body. This new body type corresponded to the “aerobics boom,” which Nomura (1990) dates to around 1983. Prior to the fitness boom, thinness was not highly valued, and adjectives such as *pocha pochā* (chubby) and *fukuyoku* (plump) were meant as compliments. Spielvogel’s (2003) study of the Japanese aerobics club includes many descriptions of instructors who strut around, gleefully displaying their youthful and trim figures in risqué leotards. In his book on Japan’s new breed, Greenfeld (1994: 124) describes the body-conscious look as “a hybrid of Japanese comic book siren and Raquel Welch circa One Million BC” that is intended to intimidate men through a combination of style, sass, and sexual showiness. In one interview, a young woman named Keiko told him, “I dress the way I do because I like the power it gives me” (Greenfeld 1994: 126). The body-conscious girl’s focus on the breasts in particular signifies a repudiation of the previous pedophilic ideal.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an expansion in the beauty types available to women as models for emulation. In addition to the cute imp style and the body-conscious style, there are more innovative looks that younger women are creating and emulating. Different parts of the body are subject to shifting concerns not shared by all members of Japanese society. People from different class, regional, and generational backgrounds also have variant ideas. My focus in the next section is on the various meanings found among young urban women, including rejection of ideals of ethnic purity and homogeneity and the marking of generational difference.

New Beauty Ideals and the Media's "Cool" Girls

In late 1999, some Japanese high school girls had a new fad: key chains decorated with dead animal parts safely encased in plastic: little pieces of things like frogs and crickets, or mice in clear resin bubbles. After decades of pastel Hello Kitty and sappy cuteness, I found this new fad perversely refreshing. Meanwhile, social critics continued to fret over this and other fashion trends, seeing them as faults to be added to eight-inch platform shoes, body piercing, tattooing, and over-tanned skin. My feelings about some of these trends are ambivalent. I celebrate the new diversity of female fashion and beauty types as a corrective to the uniform cuteness and docility manifested by earlier icons, yet I am also disturbed by the exponential increase in the nature and amount of beauty work an average girl or woman needs to do to accomplish these looks.

The displacement of identity onto the body surface and the concurrent increase in consumer products necessary for the attainment of these new body styles have overshadowed attributes formerly considered essential to the construction of female selves, particularly family status, abilities, and character. The images found in magazines and in beauty industry promotional materials are not just depictions of archetypal fashions and styles, nor are they simply advertising maneuvers. They also provide a visible representation of values and meanings circulating in youth culture, which are pilfered, recreated, and reintroduced to a wider audience by the media. Being modern, traditional, international, and Japanese may be simultaneously imprinted onto the body. Although some of the styles that evolved since the 1990s threatened to disturb racial classifications, these youth styles are usually not connected to radical politics, but rather are self-expressions of resistance and rebellion. I would like to illustrate a little of the diversity in these beauty ideals and to suggest that while the media industries are drawing on the angry mood of female subcultures for much of their contemporary beauty imaging, young women themselves are both accommodating to and resisting the images fed back to them.

Beginning with the basic template of a thin body with largish breasts and smooth, hairless skin—core elements of the beauty system to be explored in later chapters—women are provided with additional models of beauty that index a variety of aesthetic criteria. These different beauty types correspond to numerous micromarkets, offering such diverse beauty services as tanning or face bleaching, gray-streaked hair (*messhu*) or nut-brown tresses (*chapatsu*). Many of these styles are traceable to subcultures or to singers and other media stars. Once the innovation occurs, adver-

tisers and media appropriate it, repackage it, and relay it back to the larger culture (Hall 1977; Hebdige 1979; Kilbourne 1999).

Okinawan-born techno/dance pop music star Amuro Namie represents one of the most popular types women have emulated, particularly in 1996–97, when she was the spokesmodel for the Takano Yuri Beauty Clinic. At that time, her long, light brown hair, makeup, slim body, and saucy outfits invoked a bar-hostess aesthetic rather than an unbaked teenager. Some observers even described Amuro as one of the new “hidden uglies” (*busu kakushi*), women who do not represent traditional beauty ideals but who are able to transform themselves into icons solely through fashion and cosmetics. Regardless of what critics made of her, young women copied her looks and her sassy attitude.³ Amuro is credited for initiating the “small face” fad (*mikuro kei*), which resulted in a new market for bogus face-slimming creams, packs, masks, and other goods. For example, the aesthetic salon Esute de Mirōdo offered a Face Slim course (a treatment that supposedly makes a round face look more angular) of twelve treatments for \$840. According to the manager of another aesthetic salon, “The reason for the small face trend is Amuro” (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 1997a). The brick-sized soles of Amuro’s shoes took hold, with sales of the retro style generating around \$100 million in the late 1990s. Early versions of these platform shoes, boots, and sandals stood around four inches high, but by 1999 women wearing eight- or ten-inch heels could be seen advancing down the streets of Shibuya. Although simply called long boots or sandals by young women, the media dubbed these “Oiran shoes” after the high-ranking courtesans of the feudal period, called Oiran, who wore tall lacquered footwear for special promenades. Mega-platforms have been blamed for accidents, injuries, and even the death of a woman in 1999. In that instance, the victim fell and fractured her skull because she had just purchased the shoes and was not accustomed to wearing them.

According to media representation, platform shoes are an aberrant, stupid, and dangerous fad (Sims 1999). I remember feminist debates about these same shoes in my own youth: the analogy to hobbling, the inability to run. Yet, from a sociological viewpoint, wearing such shoes also denotes a level of social trust that is not so different from usual operating assumptions—a compact that one will not need to run. Walking around Tokyo and riding the subways, I also recognized another, possibly unconscious, appeal: the sense of power that comes with increased height. On more than one occasion, I saw a platform-shod girl smirking down at the bald pate of a chubby salaryman, barely controlling her contempt. In interviews, one woman revealed, “You can’t imagine how great it feels



FIGURE 4. *Kogyaru* style in 2000. Reproduced with permission of *Men's Egg* magazine.

to see the world from this height,” while another said, “In the commuter train, the level of my eyes is higher than middle-aged men, who are so arrogant in the office” (Sims 1999).

The media took the big shoes, Amuro look-alikes, and other beauty trends and subsumed them all under a generalized, usually derogatory, category. The classification was the *kogyaru* (clipped from *kōkōsei gyaru*, high school girls), usually rendered as Kogal in English.⁴ What started out as a subcultural trend soon emerged into the consumer arena via the media. First, average-looking amateurs began modeling for “street” magazines such as *Egg* or *Fine Surf & Street Magazine*. After that, marketers and media began to use the image of the Kogal (figure 4) as a type iden-

tifiable by her miniskirt, bleached hair, loose socks (knee-length socks worn hanging around the ankles), and big shoes.⁵

The media creates metalinguistic labels, which are in turn adopted or recycled by consumers, contributing to the widespread recognition of diverse fashion types. The Kogal, condensed to a caricature, became an important grouping in the fashion taxonomy, as well as a potent marketing category. Up until at least 2000, such women continued to be targeted in advertising as a specific category of consumer, as in an ad for a depilatory cream in which a drawing depicts a “typical” Kogal with platform shoes, dyed hair, and her arm draped over her head, exposing a smooth underarm area.

The media use of designations such as *kogyaru* transforms the possible insurrectionary potential of some of the new girl subcultures into a uniform group of mindless bad-girl consumers. It also serves as a vehicle for mainstream outrage at the economic and cultural power of youth, especially the subcultural compositions of young women. Paraphrasing Stuart Hall (1977), Dick Hebdige (1979: 85) says, “A credible image of social cohesion can be maintained through the appropriation and redefinition of cultures of resistance.” We may also formulate Hall’s (1977) idea this way: the media “records” girls’ resistance, but then “recuperates” it through labeling and redefinition.

The Kogal style taken to an extreme gave birth to the *ganguro* (black face) style. Foreign pundits often make the mistake of seeing this style as an attempt to emulate African American looks, which is an entirely different named subcultural style (B-Girl).⁶ *Ganguro*, with their screw-you makeup, are not trying to look black, American, or like anything ever seen before. One method to discredit and contain the power of girl culture is through this and other derogatory labeling, such as calling those who exhibit the new styles “mountain witch” (*yamamba*) or “ogress daughters” (*yamamba-musume*) because of their striking appearance, most notably their extreme hair colors and the contrast between these, their tanned skin, and the use of white or pale makeup around the eyes and on the lips.

There is not just one official beauty standard, of course, even in the Kogal subculture. I would like to mention a few other icons of girl culture. One of these subtypes is the faux-Hawaiian surfer girl. Surfer girls sport deep tans, set off with white frost or opal lipstick and tropical clothing, such as the pareo or sarong. These can easily be found in shops such as G-Girls Surf or Cocolulu in Tokyo’s trendy shopping areas. A feature article in *Fine Surf & Street Magazine* (1999b), entitled “This Summer I’m Gonna Be Miss Surf!,” illustrated the season’s coolest bathing suits, platform sandals, aloha shirts, and koa seed necklaces.

An attribute of the surfer girl that sets her apart from other types is her gleaming smile and upbeat, cheery countenance. Unlike the cute aesthetic of the past, in which women demurely covered their mouths when smiling or laughing, Miss Surf grins openly, sometimes with a little confidence boost from enamel bleaching, porcelain veneers, resin bonding, and new teeth-whitening products (technologies also popular in the United States). According to some scholars, baring one's teeth is a threat display, so covering or de-emphasis of the teeth is a submissive signal. Covering the mouth while smiling or giggling is etiquette dating to the Edo period (Casal 1966) and, like teeth blackening, might be related to a desire to subdue a woman's animalistic or aggressive potential.⁷ Miss Surf and other young women who fearlessly smile are therefore challenging a long tradition of enshrouding the female mouth. Recent focus on the teeth has created a new industry in teeth-related beauty products and services, such as "dental aesthetics" (*dentā esute*), which usually refers to nothing more glamorous than teeth whitening. One illustration is the success of Apagard-M, a toothpaste produced by the Sangi company that whitens and repairs teeth through calcification. In March 1995, Sangi sold \$40 million worth of the toothpaste, and by 1996 sales had grown to \$100 million (*Look Japan* 1998).

Today's desired teeth are not only white, they are straight and uniform. Writing on images of women in magazines during a period when the unbaked pixie ideal was in full swing, Clammer (1995: 202) noted that there were "many with crooked teeth." Although the overlapping front teeth of idol singers such as Matsuda Seiko were once considered endearing and sweet, for Miss Surf and other young women today, they are a source of embarrassment. Beginning in the mid-1980s, there was a growth in the demand for orthodontia and dental cosmetic services, mainly among young women (*Across* 1992). Once the teeth are white and straight, they may still be the subject of additional beauty work. At the Japan Aesthetic Dentistry Salon, one may get treatments such as Quick Ceramics, Smile Cosmetics, and finally, Teeth Piercing, in which small gems are implanted.

Overlapping with surfer types are other deeply tanned girls. Some of these urbanites perform a sort of Kogal drag with touches of 1970s retro-chic. Styles such as these express creativity and divergence from mainstream culture, and are guaranteed to distress the over-thirty crowd. The beauty work needed to create the new styles may be expensive and time-consuming. When I asked a woman about her *messhu*-style (gray-streaked) hair, she explained that it required at least seven hours of work. In order to keep the deep tan, frequent visits to a tanning salon are essential.⁸ At

Club The Sun Lounge or Tanning UV Zone, a thirty-minute tanning session runs between \$8 and \$17. In place of a visit to a tanning salon, one could use a self-tanning cream or lotion, or spend \$3 for the single-use Tan Towel, a self-tanning product you wipe on the body.

Trendy styles often blend ethnic appropriations, including incorporation of Native American, Southeast Asian, or South Asian attire. For example, Yoshida Asami, of the pop music group True Kiss Destination, once appeared in a Mexican serape draped sarong-style, with suede platform boots, feathered earrings, and a tall eagle feather tucked into the back of her hair. The China fad in 1997 and the “Vietnam taste” fad of 1998 featured silk jackets and hair arranged in chignons. Tama-chan of the pop music band Hysteria Blue represents the “stateless” (*mukokuseki*) global hippie version. She often wears paisley print skirts or dresses and peasant blouses, sometimes referred to as the “folklore look.” With her bleached hair and giant shoes, she resembles a suprahistorical and slightly jaded flower child. In her study of Japan’s teenage culture, Merry White (1993) notes that some of these mixed retro and ethnic styles were already endorsed in the early 1990s. During the mid-1990s, forms of body art like tattoos, *mehndi* (traditional henna body painting from India and the Middle East), body piercing, and nail art made inroads into Japanese youth fashion (*Asahi Shimbun* 1997a). Their popularity suggests the transnational nature of many youth styles. It is important to keep in mind, however, that beauty trends in Japan are not “failed versions” of Euroamerican styles but rather express a separately developed aesthetic, which may nevertheless draw inspiration from outside Japan. In her analysis of recent magazine images of women, Emiko Ochiai makes the keen observation that “they do not pretend to be white women anymore. They seem to be slipping out of any nationality” (1997: 164).

Kogals, surfers, and other subcultural types created a space for women to play with a new aesthetic of the noncute or the cute infused with an ironic twist. A fallout of the Kogal blitz was that it promoted a diluted “Gal” style that has become mainstream. The term *Gal* is still used in teen media such as *Cawaii* magazine, where we find “Gal style” used for hip, trendy girlhood. The Kogal also generated an anti-Kogal fashion backlash: New Traditional (*nyūtora*), Conservative (*konsaba*), and Older Sister Style (*onēkei*) brought back frilly blouses and longer skirts. Instead of a deep tan, some women sought pale skin. Unlike fashion trends in the past, these new backlash styles have not made other styles obsolete but are simply offered as more options. They also constitute a form of distancing from trendsetters such as the *ganguro*, who are often from working-class back-

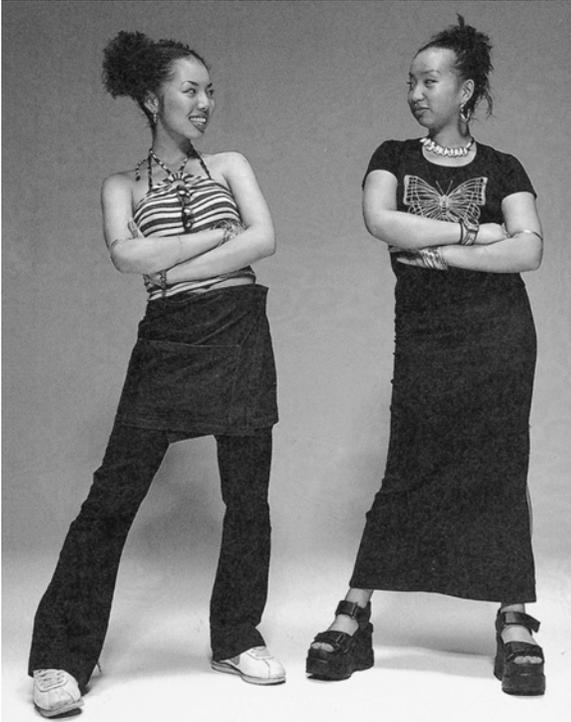


FIGURE 5.
B-Girl style
in 1999. From
*Hip-Hop Style
Bible* magazine.

grounds and not from the world of trading companies, women's volunteer organizations, and tennis dates. The conservative styles adopted by such young people may therefore suggest enduring aspiration for middle-class adulthood.

Tanned skin, big shoes, and processed hair are also hallmarks of a separate African American vogue, sometimes called B-Girl style. Young women commandeer not only the surface representation of "black" style but ways of moving and standing as well. Two Japanese high school B-Girls reflect this new mode in figure 5.

Hitoe, a former member of the girl group Speed (now disbanded) who has changed her look many times over the years, was heavily into B-Girl style in 1999. She openly admired and emulated American artists such as Brandy, and told an interviewer she adopted this look when she saw the American girl group TLC in their promotional video for the 1994 album *CrazySexyCool*. Hitoe told the journalist that when she saw TLC's video, she said to herself, "I want to be like that!" (*Bounce* 1999: 120). Hitoe's

identification with this style defies the negative images of blacks otherwise projected by the Japanese media (see Russell 1998). In her attack on white American appropriation of black style and culture, as seen in media representations of Madonna, Hooks (1995: 321) says that “authentic black women can never ‘publicly work’ the image of ourselves as innocent females daring to be bad. Mainstream culture always reads the black female body as a sign of sexual experience.” Hitoe and other female Japanese can also imitate these sexy poses and self-confident attitudes in ways denied the actual black woman. Japanese appropriation of “black style” is also narrowly limited to specific representations. Hitoe is not copying the style of the Baptist choir singer or the working mother, but rather that of hip and wealthy superstars found in films and on MTV. Japanese female culture makers exhibit a playful attitude toward racialized categories. For example, pop singer Hamasaki Ayumi skillfully confounds racial categories in 1999 CD cover jackets for her album *Appears* and her single *Loveppears*, in which she presents a “white” Ayumi and a “black” Ayumi.

Embodied in many of the new girl prototypes is a rejection of cultural proscriptions about proper female affect and presentation of self. The media provides images of models, pop music stars, and everyday girls who confront the camera with less than bashful poses and facial expressions. On music television programs, one can see irretrievably immodest celebrities, such as Hamasaki Ayumi or Hitoe, sometimes refuse to smile, giggle, or laugh when male interviewers ask patently stupid questions or make sexist allusions.⁹ In place of cheerful perkiness and a demure sidelong glance, we find slouching audacity and petulant stares. The soft, sloping shoulders of the Taishō beauty have been replaced with jutting shoulders and space filled with angled elbows and hips. What I see in this and other styles is a cover for the open display of an aggressive, independent attitude.¹⁰ The insurrectionary poses that would normally be categorized as rude, whorish, or low-class take on new meanings of hipness when aligned with subcultural fashion and makeup styles.¹¹

Media saturation with faux-Hawaiians, dark B-Girls, and Indian maidens are also, perhaps covertly, metastatements that challenge mainstream rhetoric about Japan’s supposed racial purity and homogeneity. These disturbers of the cultural peace are upending tidy categories of race and gender. At the same time, this racial and temporal hybridity, in which styles from different places, ethnic groups, and eras are seamlessly appropriated, is symbolic of Japanese affluence. A young woman may select from any style she wants, and any makeup, hairstyle, or beauty technol-

ogy she wants is available to her, an aspect of the beauty industry also seen in the treatments offered by aesthetic salons.

Facing the Past?

Running counter to the tanning craze is a preference for pale skin, called the *bihaku būmu* (beautiful white boom). Dermal consciousness is ancient in Japan, and traditional beauty standards from centuries ago emphasized pale, translucent skin.¹² Shiseido discusses the Japaneseness of “white skin” in its skin-lightening product pamphlets, claiming that the whiteness of Japanese skin is different from “Caucasian whiteness,” and that it is not simply the unique color but the quality of Japanese skin that is notable. “No matter where they are, everyone says that as for Japanese skin, it’s somehow different from the skin of those in any other country.”¹³ From the Heian period (794–1185) on, women and men whitened their faces with a variety of substances: a powder made from rice, a liquid made from the seeds of the jalap plant, or white lead mixed with some type of starchy substance (Casal 1966). White makeup (*oshiroi*) is still used for weddings, in the theater, and by performing geisha.¹⁴

Historically, not all women were able to pursue this ideal, since the desire or ability to display pale skin was limited by one’s class status. Bones of Edo-period samurai women show levels of lead contamination three-fold greater than that of the bones of women from farming and fishing communities (Nakashima and Matsushita 2004). According to Ashikari (2003), the gendering of the white face occurred during the Meiji period, and subsequently the middle-class woman’s whitened face came to signify native tradition and Japaneseness. Although some women in the past sought whiter skin by praying to Konsei, the Shinto god of childbirth and marriage, these days women rely on Japan’s cosmetics industry, the second largest in the world after the United States, to help them achieve the complexions they want. The Japanese cosmetic market has been dominated by a small number of manufacturers: Kose, Shiseido, Kaō, Kanebo, Pola, and the French company L’Oréal. None controls more than a fifth of the market (Datamonitor 2003), and many smaller companies are able to sell niche items.

The extreme form of *bihaku* hyperpigmentation is represented by Suzuki Sonoko, founder of the successful beauty company Tokino (re-named Sonoko after her death in 2000). Suzuki had great success selling diet books, weight-loss foods, and cosmetics via mail order catalogs. She

opened her first retail shop in Ginza in 1998, earning \$100 million in 1999. On the first floor, decorated with Greek statues of goddesses and blue and gold draperies, one can buy her skin-lightening cosmetics. The mask, cleanser, lotion, creams, and makeup required for the lightening process are priced around \$500 for the total treatment package. On the upper floors are a restaurant, cafeteria, and take-out counters for low-fat, low-salt food products.

A longing for pale skin preceded the Sonoko media blitz, however. American companies had sold skin-bleaching cosmetics for years, but those products, such as DermaFade and Porcelane, contain a bleaching agent (hydroquinone) that actually kills the skin's pigment cells, so they are banned in Japan. In 1985, Shiseido created a product that uses arbutin, which lightens skin by inhibiting the enzymes that trigger melanin production. Called Shiseido UV Whitess Essence EX, it is the leader in a \$2 billion skin-whitening product category in Japan (Russell 1995). Other top-selling whitening cosmetics are Kaō Sofina Medicated Whitening Cream (considered cheap at \$55, half the price of the Shiseido version), Kose Bihaku Whital Skin Care, MD Rezept II Whitening Essence, Confia Fresh Gel White, Hollywood Cosmetics Cesilla Facewhite Lotion and Extra White Lotion, and Takano Yuri's Whitening C Esthe. The American and European cosmetics companies have now created their own arbutin-based whitening formulations, which are sold only in Asia. The notion that dark skin is a "problem" that requires "fixing" makes products with names like Pond's Double White, Helena Rubinstein Future White, and Estee Lauder Advanced Night Repair Whitening Recovery Complex unsuitable for the American market.¹⁵ Many salons also offer *bihaku* treatments, such as Estedamu Salon's Super Whitening course, which uses an agent said to "trap" the melanin, and the double chemical peeling offered at the Seishin Medical Esthe Clinic. Another clinic offers full-body whitening treatments for brides, using application of vitamins and natural ingredients, such as mulberry root.

The *bihaku* look is often accompanied by a return to conservative suits, dresses, and pearls. Although the media claim that *bihaku* is a universal fad, on my visit to Sonoko's Ginza shop I saw mainly women over twenty-two, Office Ladies (*ōeru* or OL, female clerks), and young homemakers. When female readers of a youth magazine were asked in a poll about their skin color, a little more than half the respondents, 61.4 percent, said they have a light complexion (*Ranking Dai Suki!* 1999b). The rest had different levels of either naturally or artificially darker complexions (cocoa brown, 32.9 percent; fairly dark, 3.7 percent; very dark or *ganguro*, 0.7

percent; other brown shades, 1.4 percent). The media commentariat interprets this white look as the outcome of concern over the ozone layer and skin damage from ultraviolet rays, even though one way women are getting whiter skin is by visiting clinics or salons for harsh laser treatments or chemical peels. My view is that *bihaku* beauty gentrification reflects a “rummaging in patriarchy’s memory” (White 1992: 404). It is a rejection of the unwholesome connotations of subcultural styles, particularly those represented by the darkly tanned *ganguro* and B-Girls, and a return to more conventional beauty norms. Because white, translucent skin has been imagined as a specifically Japanese ideal of femininity, for Office Ladies and good girls from the middle class, the *bihaku* mode is a type of restorative of traditional values. *Bihaku* allows the greatest gender and class contrast with the leathery skin of the laborer, with his “laborer sunburn” (*rōdōyake*). These conventional norms are also deeply nationalistic, so the return to pale skin is a return to old-fashioned Japaneseness, a type of beauty nationalism. Among subcultural girls and working-class Japanese, by contrast, the extreme white face was often spoofed, and Suzuki’s chalky face and bright red lips were once featured in tongue-in-cheek goods, dolls, key chains, and stationery sold in trendy culture shops and street stalls.

Before leaving the face, I should also mention the eyebrow, which is again the focus of intense beauty work. Eyebrow plucking and shaping, or sometimes complete depilation followed by painting in a substitute, is beauty work both men and women practiced from at least the Heian era. Now the perfect Taishō crescent has been replaced with a menu of possible eyebrow types, each with its own “meaning.” When I visited Shiseido’s Cosmetic Garden, a makeup emporium and tryout showroom in Omotesandō, a beauty consultant gave me information on eyebrow shapes, tools, and techniques. She even provided me with a sheet listing some of the new eyebrow types: the Elegant Shape, the Up-to-Date Shape, the Youthful Shape, and the Gentle Shape. This seems to me to be a particularly forthright way to code and catechize cultural meaning.¹⁶ One can also buy eyebrow templates representing the eyebrow shapes of celebrities to use as a guide when drawing in one’s own eyebrows. New jazzed-up eyebrow maintenance products are also sold, such as the \$55 Pink Free Eyebrow Make, which comes with five different attachments for brushing, cutting, and shaping the eyebrow. Some critics have noted that the new styles in eyebrow fashion often transform a face from a soft, gentle visage to one that is more harsh (*Tokyo Shimbun* 1996). Others see the trend in more positive ways. Archaic vocabulary for beauty types related

to the eyebrow has recently been resuscitated. There's "moth eyebrow" (*gabi*), an antique term for a beauty with arched eyebrows, one whose eyebrows are as delicate as a moth's antenna, and "willow brow" (*ryūbi*) to describe those with brows as lovely as the leaves of a willow.

Given the availability of so many beauty products and services, the question of whether or not new beauty styles merely represent commercial indoctrination seems obvious, yet there is a complex interplay between capitalist social compulsion and individual resistance. At the same time as women are asked to submit to prevailing beauty images through consumption of products like Opera Eye Putti, an eyelid adhesive that adds a temporary fold to the eyelid, and Dr. Make Body Refining Lotion, a lotion for getting rid of cellulite, they are also given a technology for personal expression that can challenge mainstream gender norms. As Bordo (1993) and other scholars have noted, images are often dismissed as nothing more than "fashion," without asking what the "fashion" is projecting or its role in the creation of meaning. During the 1970s, round faces, scant makeup, and childish clothing were a visual code for purity and innocence. What message, then, is delivered by artificial tans, gray-streaked hair, and high platform boots? Some view these new fashions as sending the wrong cultural message—a lack of morals and perhaps an interest in amateur prostitution. We might also construe these new looks as part of women's struggle to emancipate themselves from their status as nothing more than good wife/wise mother marriage fodder and future breeders for salaryman consorts.

Representations of new beauty types have powerful currency because, similar to the British punk rockers described by Hebdige (1979) and the punk girls in the United States interviewed by Leblanc (2000), they symbolize a rejection of homogeneity, conformity, and mainstream values. These new technologies of beauty provide a space for jettisoning expected behavior and gendered norms. The images I see involve representations of women not as social beings, such as mothers, wives, and daughters, but as people with intentionally formed and decorated surfaces. These surfaces express forbidden content: an impertinent panache, independence, adult sexuality, and self-confidence. The social, political, and economic changes in post-bubble Japan have allowed many young women to challenge or play with mainstream models of desirable femininity. For young women who know they will never get into Tokyo University or become a sales director at Mitsubishi Motors, these beauty styles represent at least one avenue in their lives where they have complete control. Japan's girl-culture beauty rebellion is contained within a sociocultural context that

affords little real social power. Even so, they are subverting gender norms, if only within the restricted level of the symbolic. Their images provide a type of *yantra* (a Hindu device for harnessing the mind, Eck 1996: 109): they grab the eye and focus the mind. Although Kogals and B-Girls are only a trendsetting minority, refracted through media models in ways intended to tame them, they are important because they certify coolness combined with resistance and its possibility for “ordinary” girls.

While the immature models cherished in the 1980s perfectly embodied the cultural ideals of naïveté and docility, today’s menu of diverse beauty types include many who exhibit a rejection of these qualities. Visual representations of women who have had obvious encounters with hair dyes, depilatory creams, eyelid adhesives, and the newest version of the Miracle Bra encode layered ideas about gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. The outward expression of self-confidence and adult sexuality seen in faux-Hawai’ians, cheeky urbanites, and sophisticated hedonists is a radical departure from the ineffectual cuteness and immature innocence of the past, reflecting changes in women’s social roles, aspirations, and experiences.

Douglas (1994) has suggested that the American media and beauty industries have succeeded in reframing a message of personal liberation as equivalent to individual bodily narcissism. Improvement, achievement, and success are expressed not in behavior or deed but through the acquisition of sculpted thighs and seamless faces. I now see the same thing in Japan, where youth identity has been displaced onto consumer-dependent beauty work, and where liberation as narcissism and its incorporation into the beauty system constitute another method for controlling the potentially disruptive features of women’s economic power and the influence of female subcultures. This notion of beauty as control over the domain of the body is seen in Shiseido’s campaign of the late 1990s, which used images of “individualized” beauty and featured the slogan “I’m really something.” However, as Wolf (1992) drives home, beauty industries deflect female demographic and economic power away from social issues onto self-directed beauty work. While this allows a modicum of autonomy or serves as a minor ritual of rebellion, it does little to effect changes in gender relations or power structures.